

PRESENTAZIONE

If it were not for Martin Luther, Giles of Viterbo would have been the most important Augustinian friar of the early sixteenth century. As a Renaissance humanist, Platonist, Hebraist, brilliant preacher, religious reformer, Prior General of the Augustinian Order, and Roman cardinal, Giles cut a wide swatch in the church and culture of his day; he also started a distinct current of Platonism joined to classical and Hebrew studies and religious reform within the Order that exercised a palpable influence up to the middle of the sixteenth century. The great figure in the footsteps of Giles intellectually and morally was Girolamo Seripando, Prior General in his turn of the Augustinians and Cardinal Legate to the last session of the Council of Trent. After Seripando Augustinian theologians played a large role in the great international debate over the next hundred and fifty years between the Jansenists and the Molinists concerning the nature of grace, divine providence, and human free will. The culminating figure in the honor roll of Augustinian intellectuals before the modern era was the cardinal Enrico Noris (1631-1704), famous in his time, whose historical scholarship, especially his study of Pelagius and Pelagianism, was notable for its acuity and the controversy it engendered.

It is this history that Angelo Maria Vitale covers in the seven beautifully crafted chapters of the present book. A translator himself of the magisterial works of John W. O'Malley, S. J.,

and Hubert Jedin on Giles of Viterbo and Girolamo Seripando respectively, Vitale ends the volume with a historiographical appendix that amounts in its turn to a magisterial survey of modern scholarship on the historical figures treated in the volume. The overall effect of the volume is to show how a process of development, transformation, and even rejection within a coherent tradition will lead us from the well known great Augustinians of the Renaissance to the unfairly lesser known leading Augustinian intellectuals of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is an extraordinary story, from which I for one have greatly profited.

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